

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 22 February 2009

LESSON: We Can Rely on God

Once again, the small portion from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians that we just listened to only makes sense if we **know the context**. Here it is:

- ? Whenever Paul was away from Corinth, some of his enemies there, who wanted to discredit him, would, in his absence, **criticize** him and start forming **factions** against him. We all know what that's like – having people talk behind our backs... (I guess some things really don't change)
- ? Well, while Paul got used to them talking about him while he was gone, this time, his critics are accusing Paul of being **untrustworthy** and **fickle**, trying to convince the people that Paul was not trustworthy.
- ? You see, Saint Paul had **promised** the Corinthians that he was coming to visit them, but then later, the circumstances changed and he had to **change his plans**.
- ? His critics jumped on this as a sign that Paul was **wishy-washy** and **deceptive**, the kind of person who would never give a definitive **yes or no** answer.
- ? And so, they went on to argue, since we cannot trust Paul's **everyday promises**, how can we possibly trust the wild things he has **told us about God**?

Paul's response is different: rather than answer the slanderous things his enemies are saying **against him**, he gives an energetic response to the slander they are leveling – not against him, Paul, but the slander they are leveling **against God**.

Paul emphatically tells the Corinthians that God is **completely trustworthy**: "**God is faithful**."

"Do you want proof?" Paul says. The **proof** he points to **Jesus Christ**.

- ? Christ is the "**yes**" to all of God's promises.
- ? If Jesus had not ever come, then there might be a reason for doubting the **amazing promises** God has made: the promise of salvation, forgiveness, holiness, and **eternal life**.
- ? If Jesus had never suffered, died, and risen, we might be able to consider those promises **too good to be true**.
- ? But a God who loves us **so much** that he **gave his Son** as the **sacrifice** for our sins, and who **continues** to give us that Son through the Church and the sacraments - THAT is an entirely **trustworthy God**.
- ? Jesus **proves** that God is not wishy-washy; God is someone **we can rely on**.

We, on the other hand, are a little **less** than completely trustworthy and faithful – at least that's what I experience in my own life. And it's what this coming Season of Lent helps us fix.

Paul talks about saying “yes” and “no.” Say “yes” when you mean yes – say “no” when you mean no. While we need to be people of our word, as Christians, **are** we people of our word?

When was it that we first said “Yes” to God? Well, at our baptism – although most of us don’t remember that. But our parents, knowing that God’s way and God’s Truth was the way to fulfillment and happiness in this life (not to mention eternal life in heaven). So, when did WE first say “yes” to God?

In many ways, that is a question you each need to answer for yourselves – because we all had that moment when something hit us and we realized how much God loves us and wants us to be with Him. I’ve told you about that moment for me – when at a prayer group meeting with my dad – just looking at the Crucifix I came to understand Jesus’ sacrifice out of love for me – and with tears in my eyes, said yes to God. But, like most of us, my “yes” to God is very fickle.

To say “yes” to God **should** have profound impact on our lives – every moment and aspect of our lives. Fundamentally, we ALL have said “yes” to God (or we wouldn’t be here). But practically, throughout the day, we say “no” to God over and over and over – because our “no” to God is exactly what we mean by sin. Every time we turn away from God and toward ourselves, we say “no” to God. Every time we fail to trust God and His teachings (and those of the Church), we say “no” to God.

The struggle of our Christian lives is to make our “yes” to God MEAN yes. But sometimes, that’s pretty hard.

APPLICATION: Difficulties vs. Doubts

We really need to remember, especially in times of difficulty or doubt, that we CAN **count on God**; we can **rely on him**; Jesus proves it to us over and over.

- ? But what happens when there is some particular Catholic teaching or practice that **we don't fully understand**?
- ? What happens when critics try to **put suspicion** in our hearts, as Paul's critics did back in Corinth?
- ? This is not uncommon in a world whose popular culture is so **anti-Christian**, so drunk with indulgence, superficiality, and moral relativism.

One thing that can **help** us in **moments of confusion** is to remember the **distinction** between **difficulties and doubts**.

- ? We can struggle with a **thousand difficulties** in our life of faith, but that doesn't add up to even **one** doubt about Christ and His Church.
- ? To **consciously and voluntarily doubt Christ's trustworthiness** is a **sin** against our faith, an **insult** that wounds His heart:
- ? He died on the cross and rose from the dead **out of love for us**;

- ? He is the eternal God filled with **infinite wisdom and love**;
- ? Rather than doubt, when we find it **difficult** to understand this or that aspect of his teaching, we don't put our friendship with Him **at stake**;
- ? we don't **separate ourselves** from the source of all truth and goodness;
- ? we don't **doubt God**.
- ? Rather, we **simply start searching for a deeper understanding** of the issue in question.
- ? We **read** about it from trusted sources, **ask well-informed people** about it, **pray** about it.
- ? Whether it takes a day or a decade, God will eventually lead us to **resolve that difficulty**.
- ? "Search, and you will find," Jesus **promised**. And we have all experienced how true that is.
- ? Difficulties are **opportunities**; doubts are **temptations**.
- ? Whether it is about the Church's teaching about the immorality of contraception, or embryonic stem cell research or the priority of life issues over all others in an election...
- ? Whether it is the Church's stance on the right to immigration and the care due to the migrant and foreigner in our land...
- ? Whether it is trusting God enough to offer Him our tithe (our 10%) each week – especially in these difficult financial times...
- ?

We may have difficulties (opportunities to trust God), but hopefully we don't have doubts (where we don't believe God and ignore or turn our back to what He teaches). Difficulties are an opportunity to say "yes." A doubt is a resounding "no" to God.

When we have difficulty with something the Church teaches, do we follow through with our "yes" to God – or do we say "no" to Him by not trusting His word. But Saint Paul has reminded us today that "God is faithful!" Do you believe that? Do you want proof?

That proof is right here in front of us – as we offer again the sacrifice of this Mass, Jesus will once again **prove** that we can rely on him, because what we offer is Jesus Christ on the cross.

When Jesus comes to us today in the Holy Eucharist, when He offers to us His Body and Blood as signs of his faithfulness, let's **thank** Him, and ask for the grace to be **just as faithful** in return.

Announcements – Meat on Fridays of Lent